

and clawed at his eyes, then hooked her ankles together and squeezed his temples tight in a scissors hold. Wally — blinded by thigh flesh now, feeling as if his head was about to pop — staggered away from the table and stumbled through the velvet curtains and out the door, where he spun drunkenly across the sidewalk and into the rush-hour traffic.

It was dusk and the light was bad, and Steve didn't have his mind a hundred percent on his driving. He didn't see the two totem-poled pedestrians in time. Elena's scream alerted him to something amiss. He slammed on his brakes; his two lawn mowers crashed unto the back of his cab, and he hit the man, and the man's naked rider landed hard on his wind-shield, the familiar breasts squashed flat on the glass, and Steve cried out, "OH SHIT!" as the torso slid down the glass and Carmen's snarling face dropped into view.

THE FRUMP

After her shift, Carmen scrubbed her face, pulled on a ratty sweat shirt and a baggy pair of jeans over her bikini and drove up the coast route to the Burger 'N' Run for a late night bite to eat before she went back to her apartment.

Without her make-up (pimples on her forehead, small acne pits on her cheeks) and wearing these figure-concealing clothes, she considered herself quite frumpy. And she was thirty-two, so why was the young Marine (a baby, looked like he was about nineteen) making goo-goo eyes at her over his bacon cheeseburger? He definitely looked too young to have seen her dance at the club. Maybe he was drunk. We're all beautiful when they're drunk.

Carmen bit her burger and a pickle slice slid out from between the buns and flopped down onto her chin. She fingered the green morsel into her mouth, but missed the spot of ketchup it had smeared onto her chin.

The Marine chuckled at her and slid out of his booth and approached her and said, "There's some ketchup, right here," pointing to his own chin. Carmen smiled and pulled a napkin from the dispenser and wiped her face clean, and said "Thanks," She couldn't believe what she said next, and she hoped it didn't leave her looking (in this babe's clear eyes) like some desperate and disgusting old lady. She said, "Sit down, bucko. I'll buy you a coke."

Later that night, after a long conversation — lots of eye contact, several beers, a bit of dope — Carmen

grabbed the Marine's condom out of his hand and threw it on the floor and strapped him on and gave him a ride he would not soon forget. And an hour later (so young, he was so young) she gave him another one. And when her ex-boy-friend Steve came knocking on her door (like she'd hoped he would) sniffing around for a little pussy, she let him in, let him see the Marine with the bright fresh tattoos sleeping in a tangle of blankets on her storm-tossed bed.

THEY DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HISTORY

The boys from the Burger 'N' run, the store managers and the district manager of Zone 17 (Vista, Escondido and Loma Alta) were in high spirits after their night of dinner and drinks that culminated with a raucous stop at the topless place down on the old coast route. After district manager Wally Herzog carried one of the dancers out of the club on his shoulders, he and the guys all piled into his company car and screamed down old Highway 101 to Burger 'N' Run #31, Loma Alta's coast route store, to get some burgers to soak up all the beer. They pushed and tripped and stumbled through the restaurant's front door, and honcho Wally vaulted the counter, slipped and fell on a strawberry milk shake that had fallen on the floor sometime in the middle of the dinner rush; he then got up and grabbed Kim Rubio, the drive-thru girl, and tried to give her a big wet kiss on the lips. But Kim fended him off; she had a boy-friend who beat her (she wore the remnant of a shiner, a purple half moon under her left eye, that night) and she did not take beatings lying down. After going one-on-one with Ruben Cerda, fending off Wally Herzog's clumsy and drunken advance was a piece of cake; she slammed a forearm into his nose and kneed him in the groin. The forearm did the most damage, sent Wally shuffling in a ball-aching hunch back through the kitchen to the deep sink with his two hands cupped in front of his nose to catch the stream of blood.

"Hey, girlie," said the manager of Burger 'N' Run #32, Escondido's Mission Avenue store. "That's the goddamn district manager you just hit; he could fire your dumb ass."

"I'm shakin'," said Kim, and though she tried not to show it, she was, not at the thought of getting fired, but at the surge of adrenalin she'd gotten from the unexpected hand-to-hand combat. She put the surge to work by stomping back to the manager's office and barking at the night manager, "I ain't cleaning that asshole's blood off the floor; fucker might have AIDS for all I know."